

Hurricane Mitch and The Coup: Examining the World's Murder Capital

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Abstract

On November 1998, Hurricane Mitch struck the country of Honduras, causing massive devastation across the country. The immediate effects of this natural disaster was the destruction of infrastructure, homes, and government services throughout the country. Research indicated the hurricane lead to food shortages, clean water shortages, and the outbreak of a variety of diseases, which only compounded the problems associated with this disaster for many in Honduras. This lead to a humanitarian crisis within the country of Honduras, which was addressed by a variety of outside agencies, as well as the Honduran government. The disaster proved that the Honduran government had inadequate institutions to deal with the kind of destruction caused by Hurricane Mitch. Our research indicates while these efforts were partially successful in addressing the problem of the hurricane, in some instances, they were either ineffective or harmful to recovery efforts done by local groups. The data indicates that there appears to be a great deal of inequality in the distribution of aid, leading many families to disperse or migrate in order to survive. The recovery was limited and in the words of then President Carlos Roberto Flores progress in the country was reversed by 50 years. Additionally, many indirect problems arose in Honduras because of the hurricane. Education levels severely decreased as indicated by studies investigating the SAGE scores of Honduran students, with only 21% of Honduran youth reaching even close to the appropriate level of primary education for their age. Furthermore, Honduras has had a higher emigration rate than any of its surrounding Central American countries, with close to 22% of Hondurans having emigrated outside the country. Studies also indicate that Hurricane Mitch was responsible for high levels of poverty within the country, and that Honduras's GDP has decreased significantly since Hurricane Mitch. Lastly, the timing of Hurricane Mitch stopped any of the Honduran government's efforts to control the gangs, who are responsible for making Honduras have the highest murder rate in the world. The economic difficulties would also lead to the a coup that overthrew President Manuel Zelaya in 2009.



Hurricane Mitch Over Honduras



President Manuel Zelaya

Why Does Honduras Have the Highest Murder Rate in the World?

Hurricane Mitch:

1. How was Honduras adversely affected by Hurricane Mitch?
2. How was the Honduran economy and society affected?
3. Does the socio-economic data support the hypothesis that Hurricane Mitch was the cause for a high murder and unemployment rate in Honduras?
4. If these factors aren't indicative of the high murder rate in the country why could it possibly have occurred? Are there any indicators?

2009 Coup

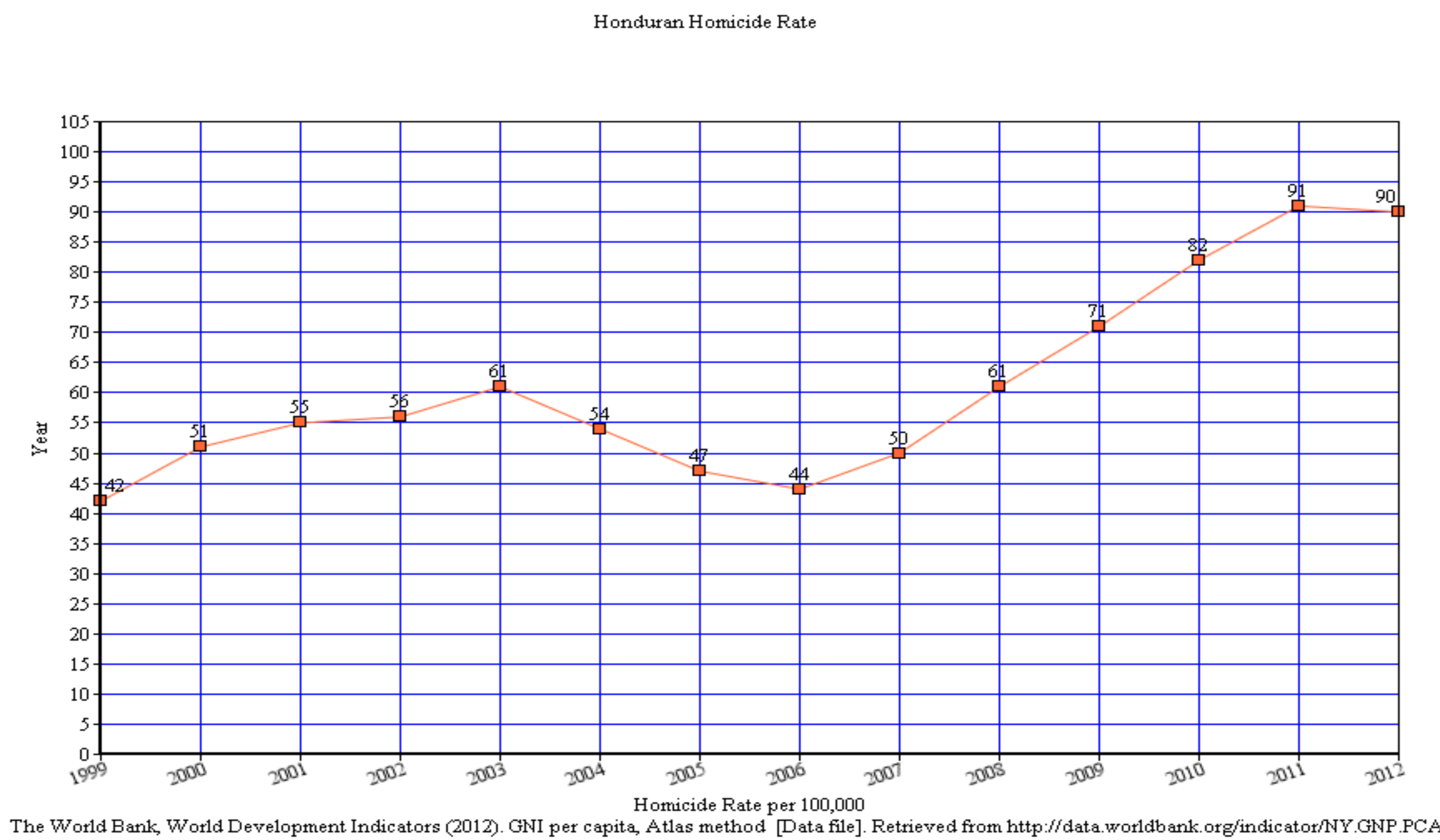
1. What was the importance of the 2009 coup in creating the current situation within Honduras?
2. How responsible was Hurricane Mitch for the 2009 coup?

Honduran Social Data

The graph indicates that while there was a clear increase in homicides following Hurricane Mitch, their was also a steady decrease in homicide by 2003. However, by 2007 homicide rates were on the rise again in Honduras. Interestingly, many of the economic and social indicators which would explain a high homicide rate such as GDP growth, male unemployment percentage, and net migration are not greatly affected long-term by Hurricane Mitch or the 2009 coup.



MS-13 gang member, a significant amount of the homicides are gang related in Honduras.

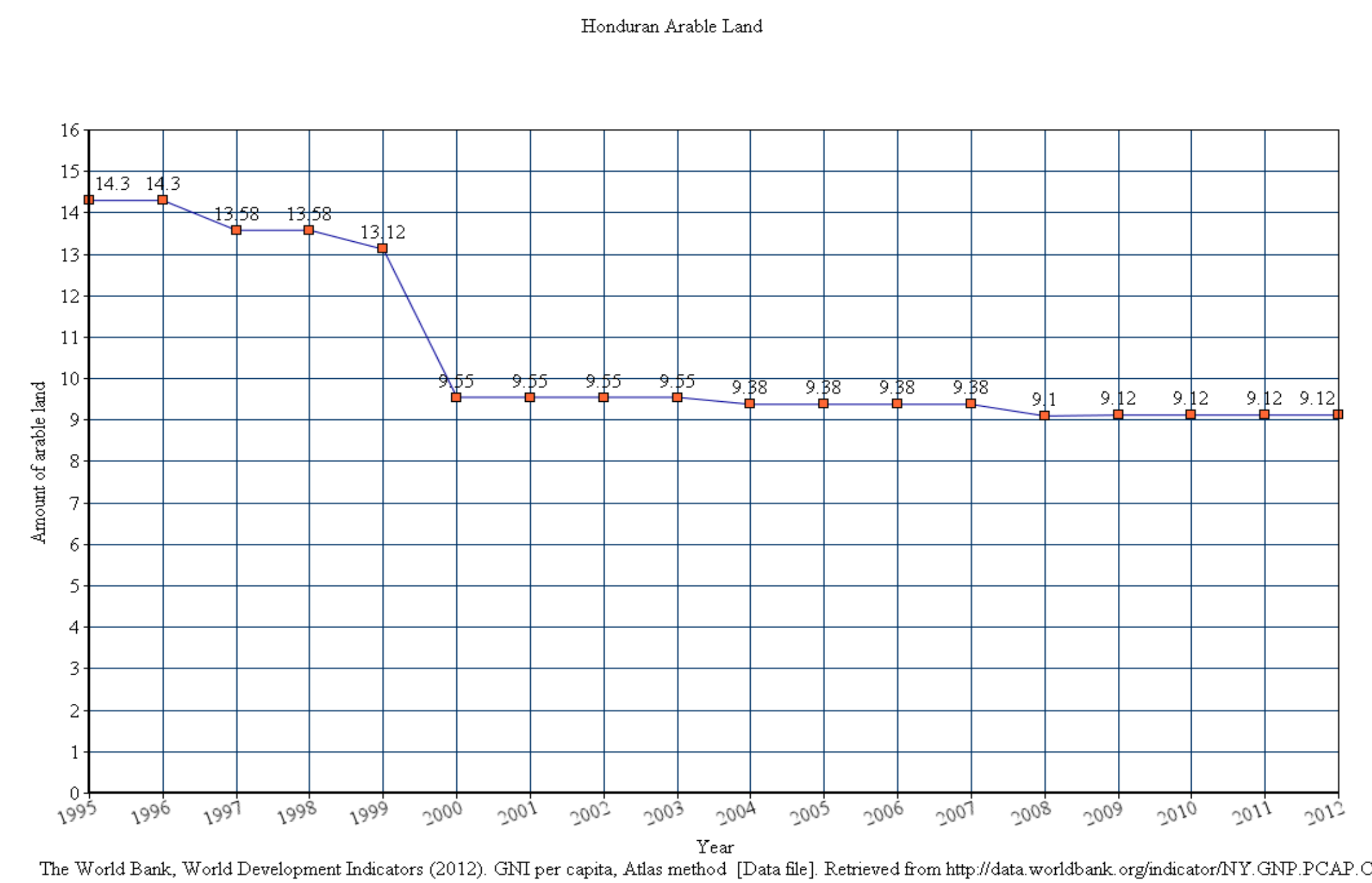


Honduran Economic Data

While the the conventional socio-economic factors do not seem indicative of the mass migrations and high homicide rates, there are many other factors that could be responsible. There existed a marked drop in arable land following Hurricane Mitch, especially in the area of the banana fields. Additionally, the percentage of Hondurans living in rural areas decreased extensively following Hurricane Mitch. These factors explain the explosion in the Honduran urban population, and possibly why the murder rate is so high. The sharp decrease in arable land from 13.12 to 9.55 is shown in the following graph. It should be recognized that a significant percentage of Honduras' arable land has been privatized by foreign companies, leaving little for subsistence farming.



Destroyed Banana Fields Outside San Pedro Sula



Conclusion

In conclusion, many of the usual socio-economic indicators do not show that Honduras has been experiencing any real problems since Hurricane Mitch. However, deeper analysis indicated that the high murder rate may correlate quite closely with the explosion in urban populations and the loss of arable land. The loss of arable land was especially significant, as much of that arable land has been privatized by foreign companies.

The 2009 coup also had serious repercussions for Honduras. Many of the poor relief and gang reduction policies that Zelaya's government had looked to place never came to fruition due to the coup. The inability to combat the rampant poverty and crime in Honduras is responsible for the mass emmigration from Honduras to Mexico and the United States. In the end, while it is arguable how greatly Honduras suffered from Hurricane Mitch and the 2009 coup, there is no doubt that they both played a role in the poor socio-economic situation.

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